

✓“DON'T DO THAT”

A Comedy in One Act

BY
JEANNETTE NORDENSHIELD ✓

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THOSE INTERESTED

CHARLES GREGORY.....

ALICE GREGORY.....

HARIETTE BUDD.....

SCENE :—*A room in an apartment hotel. Furniture trick
and otherwise arranged as per scene plot.*

TIME.—*Last Thursday afternoon.*

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“DON'T DO THAT”

(*When the curtain rises CHARLES GREGORY is discovered holding a tray of a trunk—Knock at door.*)

CHAS. Come in!

(*Enter HARIETTE.*)

HARIETTE. Is this Mr. Gregory?

CHAS. (*puts tray down*). Yes, come in—you're the young lady who is going to assist me this afternoon, aren't you?

HARIETTE (*looking around nervously*). Yes, sir. I was sent here—but what am I to do?

CHAS. First of all you're going to take this fifty dollars. (*gives her money*) After that you're going to do exactly as I tell you.

HARIETTE (*looking at money nervously*). Fifty dollars! (*offers it back to him*) I really couldn't take it—you see I don't know what I'm to do and—

CHAS. (*refusing to take money*). Tut, tut! Incidentally Tommyrot! If I want to pay you fifty dollars for a half hour's work that's my business. You put that in your pocket, and say nothing, saw wood—You know how to saw wood, don't you?

HARIETTE (*nervously*). No, sir; I never sawed—I mean I never saw—

CHAS. (*aside*). Bright girl. (*laughing*) What's your name?

HARIETTE. Hariette Budd.

CHAS. Indeed—Hariette Budd—You'll blossom soon—won't you?

HARIETTE. Yes, sir, most buds do that.

CHAS. Well what's the matter—what's the matter—what makes you so nervous?

HARIETTE. I think it must be the room, sir. It seems uncanny—feels like ghosts might be around and mysterious things—I want to go home. (*hands back money*)

CHAS. No, no—you better keep that. (*hands back money*) What nonsense—I've got nothing here but a couple of trunks I was packing when you came in and some antique furniture I picked up at an auction sale—my wife is crazy on the subject of antiques, and that isn't the only subject she's crazy on—Are you a jealous woman Hariette?

HARIETTE. Jealous! I don't know, sir. I've never had any reason to be jealous.

CHAS. Well you're a woman, so all you need is a reason—come on, pull yourself together—there's nothing to be afraid of—would you like a little drink?

HARIETTE. No, sir; I never drink.

CHAS. Would you mind pouring out a drink for me from that bottle?

HARIETTE. No, sir. (*crosses to table, touches bottle, it disappears, then immediately returns to original position—HARIETTE starts back scared*)

CHAS. (*laughs, crosses to table*). That's nothing. (*takes up glass from table*)

HARIETTE. Who are you?

CHAS. (*crosses to her, makes pass with hand, bottle appears in hand*). Sh! I'm the devil in disguise! (*pours liquid in glass—hands bottle to HARIETTE*)

CHAS. (*holds glass toward her*). Taste it!

HARIETTE. I'd rather not.

CHAS. Go on—it's good. (*puts it to her lips*)

HARIETTE (*takes a sip—smacks lips*). I never tasted anything like that before—it is good. (*reaches for more*)

CHAS. Of course you never did—it is good. (*drinks it—crosses to table and puts glass and bottle on same. HARIETTE looks for handkerchief*) What are you looking for?

HARIETTE. My handker—(*CHAS. takes one from her sleeve and hands it to her*)

CHAS. Look there—(*flowers appear—hands them to her—HARIETTE about to take them they float about room and then go into vase. HARIETTE scared, rises and follows movement of flowers*) It's all right—I won't do any more tricks—I do this merely to show you that you must be a good little girl and do exactly as I tell you—(*takes her by arm and leads her to chair near table*) Sit down and listen attentively—(*raises her from chair*) Just a moment, my wife is insanely jealous—not because I'm such a handsome brute or anything like that but just because she's one of those dear delightful darlings who can be jealous without cause. I've tried every way in the world to cure her, but up to the present moment I haven't been successful. I'm going to make one last supreme effort this afternoon and if it fails my address to-morrow will be No. 14 East River. Now for the sake of a man in trouble and that fifty dollars you're going to help, aren't you?

HARIETTE. I don't see how I can help you. If she finds me here won't it make matters worse?

CHAS. Ah! that's it. She isn't going to find you here.

HARIETTE. You mean you're giving me fifty dollars for not being here?

CHAS. Not at all—I'm giving it to you because you are here to help cure my wife.

HARIETTE. I'm sure I don't understand you, sir.

CHAS. Of course you don't; but you're going to understand in a minute. Now I'm going to tell you frankly, this is a matter of life and death with me. This experiment I am going to make to-day has been planned and studied out for two years and if, as I said before, it fails I'm going to wet my finger carefully, put it on the third rail somewhere and go up in smoke. I simply can't stand the pressure any longer. My wife makes my life perfectly miserable with her jealous outbursts. Believe me I wouldn't talk this way to a perfect stranger, if I didn't love my wife—I do love her, but in order to have any happiness she must be cured. Do you know if I look at a newspaper and there's a picture of a three handed shoplifter in it and my wife catches a glimpse of it—do you know the answer? She grabs the paper out of my hands, tears it into little bits, stamps on it, begins to froth at the mouth and pulls down the lace curtains—screams out in her delirium that it is my affinity. One day last week, walking down the street with my wife, a colored woman stepped on my foot. I turned to look around, my wife grabbed me by the arm and accused me of flirting. You know it's pretty tough on a man to go through life blindfolded—you're awake, aren't you?

HARIETTE. Yes—oh! yes——

CHAS. So I've made up my mind she simply must be cured and you're going to help me.

HARIETTE (*rises*). Yes, sir; I'll be glad to if I can. What can I do?

CHAS. Well there you are—yes—yes—(*takes out watch*) She'll be here in a minute. First of

all, I'll lock the door. (*goes toward footlights—then toward C. D.*)

HARIETTE (*frightened*). Must you do that?

CHAS. (*locks door*). It's part of the plot. (*crosses to HARIETTE*) Now when she tries the door and we hear her voice outside I want you to say loud enough for her to hear "Oh! Charlie don't do that."

HARIETTE (*returns money*). I guess I've got to go now.

CHAS. Why?

HARIETTE. I couldn't say that.

CHAS. Why not?

HARIETTE. Because I don't know what you're going to do.

CHAS. I'm not going to do anything.

HARIETTE. Oh!

CHAS. I simply want you to say loud enough for her to hear "Oh! Charlie, don't do that!"

HARIETTE. And then you're going to let her in?

CHAS. Yes!

HARIETTE. And when she starts to pull my hair out I'll have to say, "Oh! don't do that," to her, won't I?

CHAS. Yes, that's where we fool her—that's where the cure for jealousy begins to get its work in—When I open the door and let her in you go in the wardrobe—Look—into this wardrobe.

HARIETTE (*scared*). But she'll find me.

CHAS. Possibly—but let us hope she won't—Now listen to me very carefully. Every time I use the word "darling" I want you to say "Charlie, dear, no matter where you happen to be—you understand.

HARIETTE. Well, not exactly.

CHAS. Well, when my wife comes in you're going to hide in the wardrobe.

HARIETTE. Yes.

CHAS. After that you're going to get out of the room and if there is any danger of your being observed by my wife you're going to hide in any other place you can find—do you understand that?

HARIETTE. Yes.

CHAS. Where ever you are if you hear me say the word "darling" you are to say "Charlie, dear."

HARIETTE. Yes, I understand, now.

CHAS. We'll try it—darling!

HARIETTE (*giggling*). Charlie, dear.

CHAS. That's good. (*stepping a little nearer to her*) Darling.

HARIETTE (*still giggling*). Charlie, dear.

CHAS. (*very close to her*). That's good—Darling. (ALICE, MRS. GREGORY *heard outside the door*)

ALICE (*outside*). Charlie, dear!

CHAS. (*stepping back*). There she is.

ALICE (*outside*). Are you going to open the door?

CHAS. (*to HARIETTE*). Hurry up; say it.

HARIETTE (*very nervously and speaks almost in a whisper*). Oh! Charlie, don't do that.

CHAS. Great Scott! have you lost your voice? I want her to hear you.

ALICE (*outside*). Open this door at once.

HARIETTE (*loudly*). Oh! Charlie, don't do that. (*slight pause, then a scream and loud pounding on the door outside*)

CHAS. (*to HARIETTE*). Go on now—hurry—hide in that wardrobe. (HARIETTE *runs and gets in wardrobe*—CHARLES *goes to door—unlocks it*) Is that you, Alice?

ALICE. Open the door.

CHAS. (*crosses to trays of trunk*). Come in—come in—the door is unlocked. (*Enter ALICE*) I'm going to take you away.

ALICE (*in passion of rage*). Where is the woman?

CHAS. Woman, woman, woman—what woman my dear?

ALICE. What woman? How do I know what woman? Isn't it enough that there is a woman. Where is she?

CHAS. My dear you're excited. What in the world is the matter with you?

ALICE. Didn't I hear her? She was alone with you in this room. She said "Charlie, don't do that." What were you doing?

CHAS. (*with perfect calm*). Up to the present time, my dear, you have devoted your spare moments to seeing things which did not exist—now you are hearing things. Your hallucinations grow worse—we must go at once to some brain specialist. Let me see now—who can we go to?

ALICE. (*takes off hat*). We'll go nowhere until I see that woman—she's in this room—I heard her voice.

CHAS. (*crosses to hat and cane—puts on hat—does cane problem*). Impossible—Impossible——

ALICE. I tell you I heard her voice and you might as well bring her out of hiding.

CHAS. Hiding! How ridiculous! Do you think I would permit a strange woman to hide in this beautiful furniture I bought for you, darling?

HARIETTE (*in wardrobe*). Charlie, dear.

ALICE (*screams, turns*). There—there—in that wardrobe! (*rushes to it—throws doors open—pounds on inside—sees it is empty—bus. ad—lib—*)

CHAS. You see, my dear, there is nobody there. (*gently taking her in his arms and leading her down stage*) You know I didn't mind it so much when you confined your efforts to seeing things, but now that you're beginning to hear voices—really, my dear, I'm getting worried.

ALICE. Yes, you're worried——

CHAS. As soon as you come into the room the atmosphere permeates with the smell of tube roses—I can almost hear a voice saying, "Relatives and friends walk up-stairs."

ALICE. Oh! Charlie—how can you jest about such horrible things.

CHAS. My dear girl nothing is terrible to me except your persistent and idiotic attitude toward women—If you ever again allow me fifteen minutes freedom I'm going to buy the Flatiron building—then tear it down and put up a tennis court for poor girls.

ALICE. You can say what you like, I heard that woman distinctly. Outside the door I heard her say, "Charlie, dear." Do you mean to tell me I'm going crazy? (*HENRIETTE comes out of wardrobe and goes into clock*)

CHAS. (*gets down on floor, does a problem*). I don't know but you're driving me crazy.

ALICE. Get up and don't be such a fool!

CHAS. What did the voice sound like, darling?

HARIETTE (*in the clock*). Charlie, dear.

ALICE (*screaming and turning quickly*). In the clock—I heard it distinctly.

CHAS. All right, if you did, go and see what time she is. (*ALICE goes to clock—opens it—nobody in it—screams—closes door*) Hadn't we better see a doctor right away, my dear?

ALICE. I won't see a doctor, I tell you. There's nothing the matter with me. I distinctly heard that woman say, "Charlie, dear"—she's somewhere in this room, I tell you, I'm going to find her.

CHAS. Now pull yourself together, my dear, and we'll go at once and see a doctor.

ALICE (*hysterical, jumps about*). I won't see a doctor! I won't see a doctor! I won't see a doctor!

CHAS. (*dances about*). Have you got the music to that?

ALICE. There's a woman in this room! I tell you.

(During this speech HARIETTE comes out of clock and starts for the door—looks bewildered.)

And if you think you're going to convince me by telling me I have hallucinations and that I hear voices you're greatly mistaken. There's nothing the matter with me except that I have a false and faithless husband. *(HARIETTE rushes to couch, throws off pillows—enters same)*

ALICE *(screams, rushes to door)*. I saw her go out of the door.

CHAS. Oh, darling!

HARIETTE *(inside of couch)*. Charlie, dear!

ALICE. Hallucinations, indeed—*(goes toward CHAS.)* This time I'm going to know who this woman is and what she's doing here. You have fooled me very nicely, Mr. Charles Gregory, but you're not going to pull the wool over my eyes any longer. *(grabs a sword which might be used for decorations on the wall)* She's in the couch. *(in a frenzy of anger runs it through the couch several times—opens couch—it is empty—is very much astonished—holds forehead with hands as though deeply impressed)*

CHAS. There you are—you see, my dear, your nerves are in a very bad shape. *(leads her away to other side of stage)* Jealousy has driven all the common sense from your head, my dear.

ALICE *(weakly)*. But I tell you I saw her—I saw her go out of the door—I heard her voice in the couch. *(HARIETTE gets out of couch and stands near it)* I saw her with my own eyes. *(HARIETTE gets behind table and goes into trunk)*

CHAS. Well I'm through—you're insane—I can't stand it any longer—

ALICE. Oh! Oh!—am I losing my senses?
(CHAS. *crosses to trunk, turns it around—brings it toward audience*) I tell you I did see her.

CHAS. (*crosses to trunk and puts in trays*). Get your coat and hat, you're going away—The simple truth is you've allowed these jealous frenzies to get the best of you. If you ever want to get well and strong and be happy again you'll have to stop being jealous, that's all—We'll both go away a few days—you see, my dear, it has effected your nerves to a terrible extent. Now you're going to promise me not to be jealous any more—aren't you, darling?

HARIETTE (*stands in middle of trunk, perfectly still*). Charlie, dear! (ALICE *looks dazed and rather puzzled*)

CHAS. Darling!

HARIETTE. Charlie, dear!

ALICE (*turns, still a bit puzzled*). There she is—seeing things am I? Look at her—look at her—standing right there.

CHAS. (*pretending not to see*). Where?

ALICE. There! You mean to tell me you don't see her?

CHAS. No! my dear, I don't see anything.

ALICE. You don't see a woman standing there?

CHAS. No, darling.

HARIETTE. Charlie, dear!

ALICE. You don't hear her?

CHAS. Hear what?

ALICE. Didn't you hear her call you, "Charlie, dear?"

CHAS. No, darling.

HARIETTE. Charlie, dear!

ALICE (*hysterical*). Oh! Oh! She's there, I tell you.

CHAS. (*going toward HARIETTE*). Where?

ALICE. There! There! Right in front of you.

CHAS. In front of me? Whereabouts?

ALICE. Not two steps away from you.

CHAS. (*feeling through the air with hands*). Tell me if I'm near her, darling?

HARIETTE. Charlie, dear!

ALICE (*hysterical*). Don't you hear her? Don't you see her? (CHAS. *feeling through air, has now placed his hand on HARIETTE'S shoulder*) Do you mean to tell me, you don't know your hand is on her shoulder?

CHAS. No, dear, I don't, but if it is I'll put her out of the room for you. Have I both my hands on her shoulders now?

ALICE. Yes! YES! YES!

CHAS. Very well, I'll put whatever it is out of the room! Of course, I don't see anything and I don't hear anything, but if it will calm your nerves I'll be glad to send her away. (*to HARIETTE*) Go in the trunk—(*HARIETTE goes into trunk. To ALICE*) Is she still here?

ALICE. Of course, she's still here. (CHAS. *goes toward trunk*)

CHAS. Isn't that singular! (*as he is about to put down lid—HARIETTE goes down in trunk*) Do you see her now?

ALICE. No, no, she's gone in that trunk.

CHAS. In that trunk—What a peculiar idea—we'll lock her in and send her away. (*locks trunk—puff of smoke is seen*) We'll have a little fun with her—will we? (*rolls trunk down stage—opens it—nobody in it—turns trunk so audience can see*) I just want to show you how foolish you are, my darling.

HARIETTE (*from box in theatre*). Charlie, dear! (ALICE *screams, drops in the trick chair, which collapses. CHAS. picks her up—ALICE clings to him as if in fear*)

CURTAIN.

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